

Using Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT) to work with offenders

Jonathan Hussey, Business Manager, Intervention Consultancy LTD (part of the Red Snapper Group) introduces the Intervention Hub.



Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a therapeutic technique that can help people find new ways to behave and respond by changing their thought patterns.

CBT has been commonly used by probation services across England and Wales to address offending behaviour and it is often used to deliver group work interventions (accredited programmes) and one-to-one work. As an approach, CBT seeks to understand why a person chooses particular behaviours and then identifies ways of replacing these with more positive and pro-social skills and behaviours, with the advantage of empowering service users to take personal responsibility for change (Winstone, 2006:79-81).

Using CBT as an approach to addressing offending behaviour can have huge benefits. For example:

- It can be completed in a relatively short period of time compared to other longer interventions.
- It has measurable outcomes.
- It can provide structure.
- It can be delivered in a number of different formats.

However, there are a number of limitations. For example:

- You need to be able to commit yourself to the whole process from start to finish.
- It often requires individuals to do extra work outside of sessions.
- It is not always appropriate for people with more complex needs.

Despite the adaptability of CBT approaches, probation in England and Wales has historically delivered CBT face-to-face. However, in recent years many organisations outside of the National Health Service (NHS) - where it has been commonly used for a number of years to address

mental health - have progressively started to embrace the adaptability of CBT through Computerised Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CCBT) which can offer significant benefits.

CCBT is defined as a 'generic term for delivering CBT via an interactive computer interface delivered by a personal computer, internet, or interactive voice response system' (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence, NICE, 2012).

Interestingly, research directly comparing CCBT with face-to-face CBT indicates that CCBT can be as effective as conventional CBT, with no statistically significant difference between the two (Andersson & Cuijpers, 2009). Furthermore, CCBT has been found in meta-analyses to be cost-effective in comparison to conventional interventions, including group treatments (Musiat & Tarrera, 2014). It is therefore interesting that probation services have not adopted CCBT sooner.

While the evidence of CCBT approaches for addressing offending behaviour is still developing, Intervention Consultancy LTD (part of the Red Snapper Group) has developed a platform called the Intervention Hub: intervention-hub.com

Launched officially in 2019 and used in several probation areas, the Intervention Hub hosts ten programmes. These are:

- The Thinking Skills Hub;
- The Victim Awareness Hub;
- The Domestic Abuse Hub;
- The Cannabis Awareness Hub;
- The Emotional Wellbeing Hub;
- The Anger Management Hub;
- The Alcohol Awareness Hub;
- The Women's Programme Hub;
- The Youth Programme Hub;
- The Education and Employment Hub.

These programmes can be used as a self-help tool or within a professional relationship. Additionally, they can be used on any device such as smartphones, computers, games consoles and internet-enabled televisions. The content of the Hubs is based on the cognitive behavioural model. Although CBT underpins all of the Hubs, they are also informed by other relevant theoretical perspectives.

As of August 2019, the Intervention Hub has welcomed over 2400 users (including custody and community offenders) and the results have been impressive. In July 2019, an independent analysis by Russell Webster found that almost two thirds (63.2%) of participants were assessed as having benefitted from undertaking an Intervention Hub programme, improving knowledge and demonstrating more pro-social attitudes, with a further eighth (11.7%) assessed as having possibly benefitted:

digitalintervention.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Intervention-Hub-brochure-RW-1.pdf

Different factors can affect the effectiveness of CCBT, such as an individual's learning style, their computer literacy and the environment in which it is undertaken (Santally & Senteni, 2013). Intervention Consultancy LTD has considered these factors when designing its programmes with the inclusion of audio bars, written text, videos, images and exercises that encourage active participation, thus making the programmes accessible to all learning styles.

Another consideration for CCBT approaches includes how professionals and users embrace new technology as this can sometimes increase user anxiety. Service User Feedback is taken from all service users who have completed the Hubs - it is built into all of the programmes. Additionally, Survey Monkey completed online surveys with 10 probation officers; 4 focus groups were conducted with 40 probation officers / probation service officers; and, interviews

were conducted with 2 managers and 2 senior managers. The results have been encouraging. For example:

- 78% of Service Users have indicated that they would recommend it;
- 73% of Service Users have found it useful
- 100% of professionals found it useful for working with Service Users;
- 100% of professionals would recommend using the Intervention Hub.

Comments include:

"I like the structured format and it helps to keep sessions focused and relevant. The exercises are also clear and help to explain things to participants and use their own examples."

Probation Officer

"I like the structure it gives to appointments with participants - enabling them to complete meaningful work and contribute towards RAR days."

Probation Officer

"I like the overall format and that this can be easily accessed independently."

Probation Service Officer

"As they work through the exercises they have to think about them, so can link their offending behaviour to the modules."

Probation Officer

With the possibility of a reunification era for probation imminent, should CCBT continue to be embraced by probation services, the benefits of this approach are clear. Although it is not an approach for all offenders who require more intensive interventions and risk management, CCBT approaches such as the Intervention Hub make evidence-based structured programmes with measurable outcomes more accessible than ever before.

References

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Intervention Hub